

17 December 1986

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-17

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A herring & some bigger fish

WASHINGTON—We are all—press, prosecutors, politicians—in full cry after Lt. Col. Oliver North, the “lone perpetrator” of the Iran-Contra scandal, and we are like a pack of spaniels who have lost sight of the quarry to bark at a sparrow.

Now even President Reagan has joined in the hunt, asking yesterday that the Senate grant immunity to North and Adm. John Poindexter so that he, Reagan, the commander-in-chief, can hear their testimony and find out the full facts about his own Iran policies just as soon as possible.

Reagan presumably will be watching North on TV next month just as eagerly and innocently as the rest of us as he seeks to solve the mystery perpetrated downstairs in the White House.

But we already know what happened. This hot pursuit of North is a red herring. What's needed is investigation of his superiors.

Blame North for zeal and glory-hunting if you will, but first blame:

- Reagan, for creating an atmosphere of such intellectual laziness in the White House that his subordinates could go off on lunatic adventures knowing that the President would neither question them nor care.

- Vice President Bush, whose aides flirted with a law-skirting aid-the-Contras operation in El Salvador. Bush now professes to be “disappointed” that he was “not informed.” Watch what he claims when he goes campaigning before the Miami Cuban community as the 1988 presidential campaign heats up.

- Former national security adviser Poindexter for keeping his head in the sand, neither inquiring into the misdeeds around him nor informing the President—and lying to the public at key moments.

- Former national security adviser Robert McFarlane, seduced by the notion that he could reorient Iran by secretly and illegally shipping weapons to Iranian “moderates”—and trusting them to keep the secret.

- Secretary of State Shultz, who knew that the Iran arms embargo was being violated, but simply sulked in his tent and misled U.S. allies. Shultz is just as culpable as Poindexter: He knew something was wrong, never inquired into it and never told the President.

- Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, who has played it both ways: denouncing the policy of shipping arms to Iran while helping the

Pentagon to deliver antitank missiles to the CIA for shipment to Iran. “Absurd,” he says of the policy he dutifully helps to execute.

- CIA Director William Casey, who broke a pledge to keep Congress informed of covert activities and who now, incredibly, professes utter ignorance of the very matters he is paid to monitor.

- Attorney General Edwin Meese, who stalled FBI investigations into the diversion of funds, the illegal delivery



of weapons to Nicaraguan Contras and the burglary of offices of organizations opposed to the Contra effort.

- FBI Director William Webster, who saw no evil, heard no evil and spoke no evil in the midst of abundant evidence of evil.

- Treasury Secretary James Baker, whose Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms for years turned a blind eye to Contra traffic in illegal machine guns

and whose Customs Service never detected an illegal flow of guns to Nicaragua.

This is where the scrutiny should be focused—at the top. The most senior officials of the U.S. government amiably tolerated the breaking and evasion of the nation's laws, and now they are filled with pity and praise for the poor lone culprit, Oliver North. Their own culpability somehow eludes them.